

# FBI Building—A Monument to Inflation

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When the huge new FBI headquarters on Pennsylvania Avenue is finally completed in 1974, a sleuthing assignment worthy of the G-men and their building might be to figure out how it wound up as the most expensive structure in Washington.

Investigating agents could start at the original estimate of \$60 million in 1962, and try to trace the building's tortuous progress through tangled government commissions and congressional budgetary thickets to the current cost projection of \$102.5 million.

In their 89,000 square feet of special laboratory area, the FBI men could dust the various architect's models for fingerprints and test interagency memos for coffee stains and telltale signs of aging.

They could keep fit for their gruelling task in the two-story gymnasium, the exercise and massage rooms and the medical center, and work off their inevitable frustrations blasting away at dummies in the pistol and rifle ranges.

Cost-of-living indices and other inflation factors could be deciphered in the new building's decoding center and fed into the enormous automatic data processing complex.

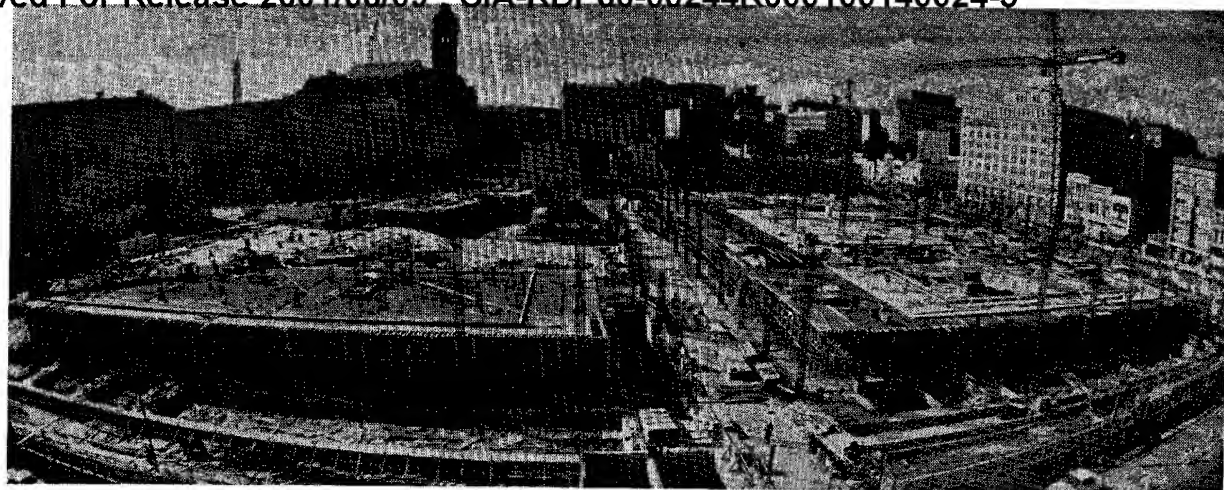
Special alarm and smoke-detection systems, a secure communications system and electrically powered metal gates would protect the work in progress from unauthorized snoopers.

THEIR FINAL REPORT could be run off in the building's own printing plant, and handed out at a formal presentation in the 700-seat auditorium to congressmen and other important people—who could park their limousines in the 800-car underground garage.

And finally, by unanimous consent of congress, the executive branch officials and the supervisory commission members, all existing copies of the incriminating report could be fed into the new headquarters building's "destruct chute" (one on every floor), down which they would plummet to the sub-basement, there to be shredded beyond all possibility of reconstruction.

Because the simple explanation for the \$42.5 million cost overrun on the FBI Building is nothing more nor less than The System—the hydra-headed bureaucracy that seems to develop whenever Uncle Sam undertakes to put up a major building in Washington.

The System in this case is composed of congressmen, executive branch officials and the Fine Arts, National Capital Planning and Pennsylvania Avenue commissions.



THE NEW FBI BUILDING CONSTRUCTION SITE FROM 9th STREET LOOKING WEST.

—Star Photographer Derris Boston

The delays caused by the bureaucratic maze become a fiscal nightmare in a period of inflation.

At current rates of inflation, construction costs increase by about 0.5 percent a month. And the escalator keeps moving inexorably whether concrete is being poured, commissions are pondering or congressional committees are debating.

THUS THE NEARLY three years it took the FBI Building plans to win approval from the three commissions pushed the price tag up to \$70 million or more—without a shovelful of dirt being turned.

Because the building was to go on Pennsylvania Avenue, it had to meet the esthetic requirements of the Pennsylvania Avenue Plan. But the commissions hadn't agreed on the plan. The inflation clock kept ticking as the commissions deliberated.

And because Congress likes to keep close control of its building projects, construction was scheduled on a three-phase basis, with each phase going through the whole cumbersome appropriation procedure.

Sometimes funds were not available at critical points to keep the work going.

By the time the first construction contract was awarded—Nov. 9, 1967—5½ years and maybe 20 million phantom dollars had slipped away.

Six months of strikes and minor modifications after construction began cost the taxpayers an estimated \$1.3 million.

Finally, in 1970, the General Services Administration, which is in charge of the project, acknowledged a 60 percent increase in the cost of construction since the original 1962 approval by Congress, and asked that the limit set at that time be raised from \$60 million to \$102.5 million. Congress, having little choice, approved the new limit.

One thing that did not add to the staggering cost overrun, GSA and the architect emphasize, was design changes requested by the FBI.

THE NEW BUILDING is referred to in some irreverent circles as the J. Edgar Hoover Memorial, and it may be that. But any suggestion that the FBI chief has been leaning over the architect's shoulder at every stage constitutes a bum rap.

"I only met the man once," said the Chicago-based architect, John Anderson, "and that was at a brief, rather formal presentation of the final plans design. He said it looked fine, or something like that."

The FBI chief has even compared the progress of his new headquarters with the building of the Pyramids—in terms favorable to the ancient Egyptians.

And when accused of resisting retirement just so he can move into the new place, he said, "This is nonsense. At the rate the building is going up, none of us will be around by the time it is completed."

The director's remarks were taken as serious complaints by certain persons, much to the dismay of Hoover, or at least of an FBI spokesman. "He was kidding, for crying out loud!" said the spokesman.

Until now, the Rayburn House Office Building has held the No. 1 spot among construction projects in the city. It was the first Washington building ever since its completion in 1964.

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ACTION LINE—OBITUARIES  
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WASHINGTON, D. C., THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 1971

SECTION B

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Artist's conception of the new building.

